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Available on loan from the CIA Library is a galley proof of an article offered to and under consideration for publishing in the Atlantic Monthly, entitled "Report on Indochina", written by a contibutor who is now (mid 1953) traveling in South East Asia.

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59

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As the summer monsoon rains poured down, the French in Indo-China were being plagued with the results of their own half-way policies — the half-hearted war they have waged on the Viet Minh for seven years and the half-measure of freedom they have granted the three Associated States.

Under the terms of agreements France made in 1949 with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, these governments are now independent "within the French Union." It is an independence which the French, at least on paper, can make look very convincing to an outsider. The government of each of the three countries may "exercise to the fullest extent all the attributes and prerogatives which pertain to its internal sovereignty." Their independence has been recognized by thirty-seven nations. Vietnam has diplomatic representation in the principal capitals of the Free World, and Cambodia and Laos would also if they could afford it.

But sovereignty involves power, and the power in Indo-China, or in those sections not controlled by the Viet Minh, is in the hands of the French. A French general whose name, Henri Navarre, fascinates the symbolists of the publicity office is the commander-in-chief of all the armed forces. French officers "advise" the high commands of the armies of the three states, and many of their units are commanded by French officers and trained by French noncoms.

Officials of the three governments are French-trained former functionaries in the old colonial administration. Those in the top jobs were selected for their posts by the French. In key areas where France has a strong military or economic interest, as in the port of Haiphong, or in Moncay on the Chinese border, a French *délégué* is stationed, again to "advise" the official nominally in charge.

It is against this behind-the-scenes control that the young King of Cambodia has been protesting so vigorously. In his outbursts of righteousness, Norodom Sihanouk has shown courage, energy, and a clever sense of public relations. He has maneuvered the French into a corner.

If they give in to his demands, it will be apparent to the world that they have knuckled under and they will be forced to grant similar concessions to Vietnam, where their military situation is far more parlous than in Cambodia, and where they have need of some firm controls. If they hold out and call Norodom's bluff, they will stamp themselves as tyrants. Viet Minh propagandists know how to make use of their dilemma.

Paris decides

If the French were as able in the field of public relations as their enemy and their protégé, they would long since have issued an uncompromising promise of complete independence for all of Indo-China — after the war. Even now such a declaration would give the peoples of Indo-China a new outlook on the struggle.

The announcement could be exploited by newspapers, by posters, by tracts dropped over enemy areas, and by word of mouth. It would counteract the Red propaganda about French imperialism. It would convince the people of the French-controlled areas, most of whom are now quite apathetic about the war, that victory would have some real meaning. It should even put some pep into the lagging spirits of the Vietnamese troops in the field.

The reasons why the French continue to hold out against making such an announcement lie not in Saigon but in Paris. As it is on so many subjects, the Chamber of Deputies is divided right down the middle on the question of Indo-China. The parties of the Right support the war and vote to continue it. The parties of the Left want France to pull out of Asia.

The actual split comes somewhere in the ranks of the Radical Socialists. Pierre Mendès-France of that party, who failed by only three votes to form a government during the extended crisis in the summer, had often expressed his desire to "negotiate" with Ho Chi Minh. That means, in effect, to give up the fight. Enough members of his own party voted against him on that issue to prevent his becoming premier.

Among the parties of the Right but not from any one of them, there is said in Saigon to be a solid bloc

59

[redacted]

July 23, 1953 Wilcox
AM-9 — (242–253) Page 245
10–35–11 4000

of forty votes which concentrate no maintaining France's power in the former colonies. In a parliament as delicately balanced as the Chamber of Deputies, forty votes throw more weight than their mere numerical value. No cabinet of the Right-Center can be formed without the support of this bloc.

The deputies who cast those votes are the voices of the firms with huge investments in Indo-China, such as Denis Frères, the coastal shippers, and Chargeurs Réunis, the consolidated shipping line between Europe and Saigon. Then there are the corporations owning rubber plantations and coal mines, and the large import-export houses. Indo-China was, before the war, a profitable proposition. It could be again. But the investors fear for their properties. They think independence has gone far enough, that the firm hand of French control is needed to stave off the horrible fate of expropriation.

How strong is Tam?

Vietnam is by far the largest and most important of the three states. It runs for 1200 miles along the coast of the China Sea, from China in the north to Siam in the southwest. It comprises the old French colony of Cochin China in the south and the protectorates of Annam in the center and Toukin in the north. Although the capital is Saigon, in the south, the war is run from Hanoi, in the north, which has become a sort of second capital.

Monarch of the 22 million Vietnamese is Bao Dai, descendant of the Annamese emperors. The French brought him out of retirement to seat him on the throne in 1949. He had retired in 1946 when the French for a few months recognized the Vietnamese Republic of Ho Chi Minh, still recognized as the legal government by all the Iron Curtain countries.

There is no national legislature in Vietnam. Government is by fiat. The premier, Nguyen Van Tam, who was appointed by Bao Dai, has the dubious distinction of being the only prime minister of a modern state to hold citizenship in another nation. He and more than half his cabinet are French citizens, thanks to their pre-war status as colonial civil servants in Cochin China. They are, according to their Vietnamese critics, "more French than the French."

Tam describes himself as a "moderate nationalist." He operates on the premise that no small, weak country like Vietnam can hope to exist in the world of today without a powerful friend and protector. His attempt to ally himself with French hounds and nationalist hares has made him the butt of criticism from both sides. The French think him ungrateful for past favors because of his annoying requests. He keeps pressing, for instance, for additional Vietnamese generals; there are only two in the whole Vietnamese army of 200,000 troops. He is also insisting on the evacuation by the French of the imposing Norodom Palace, a little Versailles in the middle of Saigon where the Commissioner General maintains his office.

On the other hand the Vietnamese people, or those of them, at least, who take an interest in politics without being in the government circle, resent Tam's toadying to the French on major issues. His highly tooted land reform bill, for example, they say was loaded to favor the big French plantation owners.

It is not easy to judge how strong the current of opposition to Tam is running. All newspapers are strictly censored. They cannot publish a word of criticism of the Tam government, of Bao Dai, or of the French. Furthermore each day Saigon's seventeen Vietnamese and Chinese editors receive from the censor a list of official releases which must appear in the next day's editions. They may be ordered to praise the minister of veterans' affairs for a speech on pensions, or to report that the wife of General Nguyen Van Tam visited wounded soldiers in the hospital.

59

[redacted]

July 23, 1953 Wilcox
AM-9 — (242-253) Page 249
10-35-11 4000

The whole of each paper, including the advertisements, is combed by the censor just before the presses roll. Editors who have violated censorship have found their papers suspended for six weeks, and in extreme cases they themselves have wound up in concentration camps.

A Vietnamese may be arrested by any of four types of secret police: either the military or the civilian "security branch" of either the Vietnamese government or the French High Commissioner. There is no such thing as habeas corpus. Saigon residents say an arrested citizen rarely is told the charges against him, and sometimes doesn't even know what branch of the police has seized him.

The police power is intended as a security measure against the Viet Minh underground. Vietnamese blame both Premier Tam and the French for using it as a political weapon where no issue of Communism is involved.

If there is a real focal point for the combined anti-Tam, anti-French, anti-Viet Minh sentiment, it lies in the person of the able and intelligent governor of North Vietnam, Nguyen huu Tri. He makes no secret of his feelings. From the point of view of national politics his Tonkinese background is a drawback. However, he is so strong a rival of Tam that the premier fired him from his post a year ago. Six months later, under pressure from Bao Dai, Tam was forced to replace his opponent in the governor's palace in Hanoi.

The war in the delta

In Hanoi a visitor from the outside world really becomes conscious of the war. Because Cochin China has been fairly successfully cleared of Viet Minh guerrillas, Saigon radiates a false aura of peace. By day in Hanoi trucks rattle through the streets in convoys of soldiers — French, Vietnamese, Moroccans, Algerians, Senegalese, and Germans of the Foreign Legion. By night, from a distance, comes the rumble of artillery.

In the Red River delta and in the mountains of the T'ai country, the French have been losing the war. After six years of fighting they still don't control the rich rice lands of the delta. They collect from the area only one third of the pre-war level of rice production. Some of the missing two thirds has been lost because land is out of cultivation. Most of it is going to supply the Viet Minh.

French armored units patrol the delta during the day, but by night the Franco-Vietnamese troops retire to their blockhouses. Then the Viet Minh move about the delta at will. Many a rice farmer who watches from his paddy as the tanks move by in the daytime, changes his role after dark to plant a string of mines along the roads or to lob a few mortar shells into the nearest French outpost.

The entire French strategy has been built around protection of the delta. To maintain even its tenuous daylight hold on the rice fields, the High Command has sacrificed all the mountain areas the Viet Minh have chosen to attack.

As tokens of counteroffensives, the French hang on to a few fortified posts scattered through the hills of northwestern Vietnam. The two most impostant are Nasan, where the Foreign Legion beat off a series of major Viet Minh assaults last fall, and Laichau, far up in the corner of Indo-China on the Yunnan border. Using coolie labor, the Franco-Vietnamese troops dig themselves into a perimeter defense around an airstrip. When they are surrounded, they get supplies by air from Hanoi. The garrisons are troops that might well be used to form a mobile reserve.

It was this strategy of retreating to strong points that the High Command chose to employ in Laos when the Viet Minh attacked that sleepy little country in April. The French abandoned a new $100,000 airstrip at Sam Neua, just built with American money, to retire to a prepared position on the Plaine des Jarres.

[redacted]

July 23, 1953 Wilcox
AM-9 — (242–252) Page 252
10–35–11 4000

The Viet Minh by-passed that plateau without firing a shot and headed for Luang-prabang, home of the King of Laos. In a panic the High Command flew five battalions of troops to transform that peaceful town into another hedgehog. The Viet Minh, influenced by the approach of the rainy season or by orders from Moscow and Peking, withdrew without testing the defenses of either position. The French promptly claimed a victory for their strategy.

One thing observers of the war were not able to understand was why General Raoul Salan never took advantage of his strategic position at Nasan. There some 5000 well-trained troops were stationed less than 100 miles from the trail along which most of the Viet Minh supplies had to move into Laos. The officers and soldiers of this polyglot army are professionals. They are well disciplined, well armed, and — most of them — well trained. If ordered to take the offensive, they will attack with efficiency and skill, if not with any martial enthusiasm.

Early in his command General Navarre began talking about attacking and ending the war in eighteen months. In mid-July 5000 French Union paratroopers landed at Langson in the Tonkin delta, ten miles from the Chinese frontier, blew up bridges, captured the garrison, and threatened to cut supply lines. The French claimed a clear victory here, but an offensive on a major scale means sizable casualties, and casualties are anathema to ministers in Paris whose government must face a vote of confidence every day, and to deputies who may be tumbled into an election any week. From 10,000 miles away, even victory doesn't seem worth the cost in blood and votes.